METROPOLITAN COMMISSION OF SEWERS.

THE COMMITTEE QUESTION.

A GENERAL court was held on Thursday in last week, at the Sewers' Court, Greek-street; the Earl of Carlisle in the chair.

Mr. Hertslet, the clerk, read the voluminous case submitted to the law officers of the crown on the business of the commission, with their opinion thereon, the substance of which appeared in THE BUILDER of last week.

Mr. Leslie then rose and said that he felt called upon, in this stage of the matter, to make a few observations. The court were aware that the opinion that had been just read had been elicited in consequence of certain resolutions as to the business of Courts of Sewers coming up from the Bye-laws Committee, and, subsequently, to the General Committee. The case, as stated, gave the different readings and different opinions taken on the subject. On the opening of the commission he objected to the words "Standing Committees," that they ought not to be permanent, and that the main business of the commission should be done in open court. Others thought that a great deal of business might be got through by a subdivision of labour, through the means of committees. Now, what were the resolutions as to the Works Committee? why, these:—"To have under their immediate regulation and management (but subject to the General Committee), all the affairs of the commission relating to works and operations of the commission, and also the immediate control over the engineers, surveyors, assistant-surveyors, and other officers and servants of the commission employed about such works and operations; and should be empowered to obtain plans, sections, and estimates of all proposed works and operations, and to employ (but subject to the approval of the court) such clerks of the works and other subordinate officers and workmen as may be necessary." Now, here it was evident that the chief functions of the commission were to originate in this committee, and on their report the court might adopt or reject their recommendations; but if the minutes of this committee were wanted, it required a requisition in writing from three commissioners to have them produced. Now, by the opinion of the law officers, they were told that no business could originate with committees, but must originate in open court; therefore, on the first occasion, he submitted that the recommendations of the Bye-laws Committee could not be adopted, in consequence of their illegality. He had told them that if they could not get through the business, they might specifically appoint committees to assist them, and that was precisely the view that had been taken by the law officers of the crown, and, as he had shown, they could not make appointments in committee, or delegate the powers of the commission to any committee whatever. This power had been usurped in the appointment of Mr. Gotto as assistant-surveyor, as they had no right to make any such appointment. Although no power could be delegated to them, yet even so recently as Monday last, and since the opinion of the Attorney and Solicitor-general had been received, which told the committee they could originate nothing, they had instructed Mr. Gotto to look out for a convenient site for trial works. The opinion said that the court must originate all the business, and that any court could alter, continue, or discontinue such committee at any court. (Cries of "No, no.")

The Earl of Carlisle said the words were, that "committees may be empowered from time to time."

Mr. Leslie resumed:—As he read the words, the court could alter or continue a committee at any court; and if any new matter was considered, it must be by an express order of court. If the ratepayers were dissatisfied with their proceedings, the matters could be removed by *certiorari* to the Court of Queen's Bench; therefore no expenditure could take place unless by order of the court. He was told that this expenditure applied only to a class of cases, where the sums did not amount to 50*l.*, which was most absurd, as they might make orders for fifty such cases, and order payment for the whole without coming to the court at all. Such being the case, he felt it to be his duty to step in and save the commission from total destruction, borne out as his view now was by the opinion of the Attorney and Solicitor-General. There would be no difficulty in proceeding with the business, when they were empowered to have monthly courts, special courts, and committees for specific purposes; but it was not for the public interest that the business of the commission should be carried on as it had been lately. They had been doing nothing lately but spending hundreds of pounds of the ratepayers' money without any order of the court. Gentlemen might smile, but he saw nothing to smile at, as he was prepared to prove it. As far as useful purposes, they had had for some time two plans for the improvement of the drainage of Westminster,—one by Mr. Austin and the other by Mr. Phillips,—and yet they could not get the subject to discuss. Another question had arisen,—an application from the Improvement Commissioners for a new line of sewer; but even this matter had never reached the court, but in common had been passed over to the committee. The hon. commissioner concluded by reiterating some of his main points of objection.

Mr. Slaney remarked that he had listened with regret to this discussion. He hoped they would come to some amicable mode of carrying on the business of the commission. It appeared to be the opinion of gentlemen that some injury was about to be committed from their being excluded from certain committees. Now he, God help him, was not on any committee, and he was not in the least offended (a laugh), but he believed, that unless they delegated the details they could not efficiently carry on the business of the court. At the same time he thought there was a fault on the other side, and that a statement of the business to come on at the court should be issued, to give them an opportunity of considering it.

Mr. R. L. Jones considered the number of the court would not prevent the whole duties being properly discharged if the court met weekly, when every gentleman might attend. The officers were now called away by committees, and could not attend to their duties. The court, too, was placed in entire ignorance of what was going on, unless they came to the court and read volumes of reports, and therefore he was satisfied the business could not be done unless they met weekly, as it was at present in a complete state of chaos. As a commissioner, he had a right to be informed of what was going on, or he had no business there at all.

The Hon. Fred. Byng said that Mr. Slaney's observation was unfair as regarded himself. He had objected to the constitution of a Works Committee, even supposing it to be legal, as the thirteen gentlemen put on it formed a complete majority, rendering the opinions of the rest of the commissioners a mere nullity. He had impressed upon the committee the necessity of its being open, and had come down to the court for the purpose of moving that all committees should be open, but found that, unknown to him, Mr. Leslie had made a similar motion, which he was happy to second. The resolutions had been borne out by the opinion of the law officers of the crown. He (Mr. Byng) was not on committees, therefore he could not be charged with having "obstructed" their business. The manner of doing it had hitherto been happy-go-lucky, and it was now time to divide their districts.

Lord Ebrington thought they would act wisely to acquiesce in the opinion received, and thereby put an end to useless and fruitless discussion, while the works of the commission were slumbering. He thought it would be prudent to take this opinion as their text for the interpretation of the law. With regard to the appointment of Mr. Gotto, the choice of an assistant-surveyor was specially referred to the Works' Committee. When he heard gentlemen talk of nothing being done, and in the same breath complained they could not read the reports, he thought the objections answered themselves. It was the practice of large bodies to refer details to smaller bodies, and in this they had an example in the high court of Parliament.

After a few words from Mr. Lawes,

The Earl of Carlisle trusted that persons appointed for the public good would act in harmony together, feeling assured that no expenditure could be valid unless it was authorised by the court. Cases of emergency, however, might arise to render it necessary to depart from this rule; and whether it applied to bodies or individuals, they must rely upon the justice of the case for the approval of the act so performed. The law officers had declared that all business must originate in the court at large; and he thought they would act wisely by following the course there pointed out: yet the court might refer such branches of it as they were unable to settle themselves. As to attending weekly, he at present held more offices than he could properly discharge; but even with weekly attention, there were at present many pressing matters,—such as house-drainage, the size of sewers, and the withdrawal of pollution from the Thames, all great matters of principle,—which he thought it would be prudent to consider first, and refer to the court, believing there was no substantial difference of opinion in proceeding to the ordinary business of the court.

Mr. Ballar then submitted a string of fourteen resolutions, abolishing the general committee, converting sub-committees into committees provisionally, and defining the duties of them. The resolutions were seconded by the Rev. W. Stone.

Mr. Leslie deprecated these resolutions being brought forward without notice of motion. He reiterated his objections to the abominable practice of committees, and, having discharged his duty, if they chose to pass the resolutions, he should not say another word on the subject.

The resolutions were then put *seriatim*, and carried as a provisional arrangement, Lord Carlisle remarking, that unless something of the kind was done, the whole business of the commission would be completely at an.

Mr. Byng then withdrew from the Finance Committee, and Mr. Leslie and Mr. Lambert Jones gave notice that at the end of a month they should also retire from that committee.

At a meeting on the 22nd, the minority entered a strong protest against the legality of the resolutions.

Miscellanea.

HER MAJESTY'S THEATRE.—When Her Majesty's Theatre was decorated in 1846 we spoke of the work at some length, as one of the most successful and effective of its kind, and we gave praise to Mr. Johnson, the architect by whom it was designed, and to Mr. Marshall and Mr. Sang by whom it was carried out. It still holds its good place in estimation, and viewing it a few nights since we were more than ever impressed with the success with which a great desideratum had been obtained,—namely, *unity, with variety*. While the eye and mind find constant occupation in the always varied groups, medallions, and Raffaellesques displayed, there is a oneness and congruity about the whole which is particularly satisfying and admirable. Mr. Charles Marshall, by whom the scenery here is executed, stands high amongst the half dozen able men now painting for the London stage. We shall have an opportunity to speak of some of his works.

ELECTRO-TELEGRAPHIC PROGRESS.—Mr. Brotherton, of Preston, has recently patented an invention for prevention of accidents on railways. It consists of an electric apparatus fixed beneath the rails, on which the wheels of the train act as they pass over it. A wire connects this apparatus with any station or junction which the train may be approaching, and at which an electric alarm is fixed. By this invention the attendants at any station or junction may, it is said, be apprised of the approach of a train any number of miles off, and in case any obstruction exists, a signal can be immediately forwarded to the train.——The projectors of the great submarine line across the Atlantic propose to construct it between the coast of Newfoundland and the nearest cape of Ireland. They state that there is every reason to believe that a submarine bank extends from Newfoundland to the British Isles, to which they propose to anchor the wires, supported in cork tubes, at intervals of 10 miles. They have appealed to Congress to aid them in the enterprise, by appropriating a public vessel for their use, to ascertain the truth concerning the nature of the bottom. Should they not find soundings, they state they could still manage to anchor the buoys by means of buckets, &c. They exhort Congress "not to allow the British Government to anticipate the United States in this sublime project."

CARD-BOARD MODELS.—In reply to a late inquiry from Tyro, wishing to know how to colour card-boards for models,—I have had many years' experience of the art, and find that the best plan is to procure card-board of the colour required, such as stone, slate, or lead colour, and shade it with warm sepia. In all cases where brick colour was required, I coloured the card-board with Indian red, and shaded as above, as I could not procure card-board of that colour; though I should think board of any colour could be procured in London, if required, which would be preferable.—H. W. BENSON, North Shields.

PREVENTION OF COAL-PIT EXPLOSIONS.—Mr. George Dunn, of Doncaster, M.D., has invented a ventilator, which he has presented to the public without appropriation by patent, and by means of which it appears from experiment at the Darley Main Colliery, where it has been tested, that such a perfectly free circulation is attainable through a pit as will obviate all chance of explosion. This ventilator, says Mr. Dunn, may be constructed of wood, zinc, tin, iron, or copper. One is to be placed, in the form of a hood or cowl, and self-acting, over the up-cast shaft, while another is placed over the down-cast shaft, with its open side or mouth to the wind, and will also be self-acting, where a down-cast shaft can be appropriated to it: by these means, a current of air is to be made to circulate through every part of a mine.

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